

Acute and long term care integration in Medicaid - Comments from the
Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this most important undertaking. Integrating and coordinating care and services are approaches that have been central to the work of the Area Agencies on Aging since our inception. I am Grace Starbird, the President of the Association of Virginia's Area Agencies on Aging, V4A. The holistic approach to care is a much more efficient, effective and person-centered care model than a fragmented series of care providers. It is patient-centered and quality-driven...a model for healthcare that puts patients at the focus of efforts. And a model that stretches healthcare and human service dollars to better support the needs of patients.

As you look at community-based integrated care, V4A asks that you have as a tenet of the model the utilization of community-based organizations with proven track records working with the various populations. Whether seniors or people with disabilities or chronic disease, these are our residents and clients today...they are constituents with whom the local area agencies on aging are working and with whom we have trusted relationships. We would ask also that the support services such as personal care and homemaker services which enable better health to be integral to the models developed. We all know that nutrition is vital to any healthy regimen, especially for the populations being discussed. Patient empowerment through choices is an important reassurance to individuals and to their families.

We would ask that you not restrict too severely the benefits or financial incentives if you proceed with enhanced benefit account plans. It is vital that individuals have supporting services (nutrition, in-home services, transportation to healthcare, emergency access through a telephone, etc.). Therefore, we would ask that these tools and services be considered and included for patients enrolled in any integrated care and flexible plans.

If the direction undertaken is to look toward Special Need Populations with chronic conditions and integrated plans for these patients, we would ask that all due diligence be given to the integration of support services as well as utilization of community-based providers who work with these same patients and individuals today. Virginia has the benefit of a strong network of such service providers in the AAAs ...neighbors who work with neighbors to

make their lives work better each day. These are services that are vital to health status. AAAs are providers who know well that communities' resources are varied and patients' needs are unique. We have been practicing for decades to coordinate for both. Community-based coordination needs to be considered for plan requirements.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to be part of this undertaking which will impact so many vulnerable Virginians...V4A is a strong proponent of care coordination. It has been our model for service delivery for our seniors for years. Integrating healthcare and support services makes sense for improving the lives of some of our most vulnerable Virginians.